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## **A Coming To and a Coming Home**

“I’m a recovering drug dependent,” confesses Gil, 52, entrepreneur and former leftist activist. After eight years, he is now on the 12th and final step of the drug recovery program: helping others, especially other dependents. His wife Ming, a cooperator of Opus Dei believes “St. Josemaria interceded for us through the Immaculate Mother and answered our prayer.”

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Little did Ming imagine that when she married Gil, he was hooked on drugs. She felt trapped but she also remembered her vows to live with him for better or for worse. She made a novena to St. Josemaría whom she got to know through her sister-in-law, a supernumerary member of Opus Dei. It was a struggle for her and for his family to get him to a rehabilitation center. The first time he was put on a drug rehabilitation program in April 1996, they did not know what to expect. On the way there, they prayed the Rosary. During the visit, Gil's sister brought a relic of St. Josemaría and would caress his back with it. When he got out of the rehab center, things were better. But soon after, he would have a relapse. After four drug rehabilitation confinements and

through much prayer, “Gil never again took drugs and he even gave up his smoking and drinking habits”, Ming happily says.

Ming recounts, “one night, I knelt down to pray the Rosary with arms outstretched. I finished all three mysteries while offering the pain as a sacrifice and asked God to end this family trial. I do not usually read the newspapers, but the following morning, I got hold of one and saw an article about a French doctor who was doing laser acupuncture that got rid of drug addiction. I immediately called up my mother-in-law and we went to see the doctor. I considered it a miracle that my husband agreed to see the doctor. After a month, he was recovered. The relationship within the family got better. I believe that St. Josemaría interceded for us through the Immaculate Mother and answered our prayer.”

Five years ago, Gil started a livelihood project in Angeles City, that employs fifty men and helps sustain their families. The project is a parking lot near the wet market, which was a way to help keep a sanitary food depot. “We need to clean up Angeles, especially Pampang, the heart of the city,” stresses Ming. The place is considered among the most depressed of municipalities with a bad road network and busted drainage system.

“So we cleaned up and leveled this part of our property, settling the squatters in another two-hectare property. This makes it safer for those going to the market, with guarded parking slots and proper traffic,” Gil explains.

The devotion to St. Josemaría has spread among the employees who have been introduced to him through

the book, “*God Provides*” which chronicles miracles and favors granted through the intercession of the saint. The book was passed around among them. Prayer cards could be seen on some of the employees’ tables and Ming has been told of answered favors every time they pray it. Among the employees of their small company, about 10 are recovering drug dependents.

As a member of a wealthy clan in the city with tracts of land that had been illegally occupied by settlers, Gil realized they had yet to resolve their own land problems. Another project was to turn over titles to the squatters.

“We talked to the city government, and they told us to turn over 13 hectares as payment for investment taxes,” recalls Gil. “They would be the ones to subdivide and distribute the property to the squatters. The

transfer was completed only three weeks ago. The first installment was last December. We started this project in 1997. In spite of the intimidation we received from some of the townfolks, we remained consistent. We want to really resolve this because we just inherited these properties and these problems. We don't want to pass these on to our children.”

Gil believes a person should have a property of his own because this gives him self-esteem and will enable him to manage it with a sense of responsibility.

To help inculcate these values, Ming and Gil came up with the San Marcelo Youth Camp, named after Saint Marcellus, a Roman centurion who refused to take part in idolatrous rituals of Emperor Maximian Hercules. The Christian soldier was beheaded for his

defiance. Gil considers this saint the patron of conscientious objectors, and it was providential that the government approved the project on the martyr's feast day, October 30. They had named their company PhiloVier Corporation, after their children Tamara Philomena and Camilo Javier.

The Youth Camp trains young people in leadership and the exercise of freedom. "We climb mountains with them to appreciate nature and be aware of the Creator; we bring them to museums to be proud of their origins; and we bring them to drug rehabilitation centers to see what happens to people who go into drugs," Ming enumerates. "We show them that they have choices in what they do with their lives. Often they grow up thinking that, since they are poor, they don't have much to do but just work enough to get by. We present possibilities to them so that

they expand their horizons. Recalls Gil, “We even brought the 1st batch to Mt. Pinatubo. When we got there, I told them to find their spot, without talking. If in times of crisis, you call on God, this time, in the sight of beauty, you invoke God.”

The alumni are now the ones recruiting their friends and relatives to join these camps. They look for sponsors and come up with initiatives for fund-raising. Some have become peer counselors.

Gil and Ming do this exercise of expanding horizons on a more day-to-day level in their own company. They provide pointers on critical thinking, team-building, values formation, and in some cases, the basics of communication (written and oral) in the course of their meetings and more individualized dealings.

But Gil and Ming know that whatever good they've somehow helped bring about in the people around them would really redound to them, to their own home.

“We also want to protect our children when they go out into the world,” Ming admits. “Gil was saying we should not just prepare our children for what's out there but to also help people around us become good, so that when our kids go out, these same people would be around to somehow protect our kids.”

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